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Moore, Frank

The reform of the  
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New York

1913

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PRISON LABOR LEAFLETS

NUMBER FIFTEEN

THE REFORM OF THE  
INDIVIDUAL

BY

FRANK MOORE

*SUPERINTENDENT, NEW JERSEY REFORMATORY*

(REPRINTED FROM THE ANNALS OF THE AMERICAN  
ACADEMY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
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MARCH, 1913)



NEW YORK

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON PRISON LABOR  
UNIVERSITY HALL, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

1913

PRICE TEN CENTS

## THE REFORM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

By FRANK MOORE,  
Superintendent, New Jersey Reformatory, Rahway, N. J.

When man disobeyed and was driven out of the Garden of Eden because of his sins, it is written that the Creator sent him forth to till the ground, saying to him that "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Thus in the beginning omniscient wisdom chose labor as the very first means to be employed in restoring fallen man. And up to the present time there has never been discovered any better method. It is of first importance in any effort which undertakes to correct the human errors—dishonesty, sensuality, impurity or violence—that man should be required to work in order that his mind may be turned to better things and his physical powers spent in doing that which is right.

Through idleness, as well as because of inadaptability to the task at hand, men fall into crime. The first task, therefore, before the man who would seek to reform his brother is to know the character of the offender. He must ask, "What kind of a man is this? Is he naturally indolent? If so, why?" In every penal institution there is always a large percentage who have not only committed crime because of laziness, but who present great difficulties in discipline because of the same thing. The most superficial objection soon singles out those who are of this character. It is a mistake, however, to stop when it has been discovered that laziness is a characteristic of an individual. The question must be asked, "Is there a cause for this laziness?"

Flat foot makes it difficult for some to be on their feet continually. Defective sight makes it hard for others to work with machinery. Incipient tuberculosis and other diseases sap the vitality. In most cases some cause can be found that is sufficient in itself to make it difficult for the defective to work as does the normal man. It is really a question whether any human being is ever lazy without a cause.

Food like fuel generates energy that uses itself in work, unless it is lost through some leak in the physical system. It is useless,

therefore, to say—a man is lazy; we will drive him to work. Our first duty is to find the leak and stop it, discover the cause and cure it. This is the duty of the physician. His office, the hospital and the operating room, must first take the man in hand, and by treatment—whether environmental, dietary, medical or surgical—render him fit for the requirements of labor. When this is accomplished and the man is thus placed where he is capable of some work, the next question to be asked is, "What kind of work is it to which this man is naturally adapted?" or since the man is always of more importance than his work, the better question to ask is, "What work will be most likely to assist this man in accomplishing his restoration?"

Here is a man that is addicted to drink. Considering the several categories of serious delinquency, we have long ago found that alcoholism is answerable for about sixty per cent of indictable crimes of violence, that it is probably the cause of nearly half the crimes of lust, and that, in addition, no small number of cases of petty larceny are committed because of it. The offender guilty of these crimes is not, however, primarily a criminal, but he is an alcoholic. It is of little advantage to settle the much-disputed question—whether alcoholism is a cause or a result. We know what the signs of well-developed, unimpaired minds are: calmness, steadiness, sound judgment, absence of impulsive action, good abstract memory, coherence and great muscular co-ordination. What does the alcoholic show: restlessness, tremor, impulsiveness, loss of memory, incoherence and finally moral turpitude and a state of antagonism to society. He is a neurotic, his nervous system cries out for that which stimulates but which in the end leaves it weaker than it found it, and must be treated. This type of offender is hard to cure. How discouraged we have been with his recidivism. What is the way? Certainly his treatment in the penal institutions will continue to fail if it is of such a nature as to irritate and weaken still further his already overwrought nervous organism. His work must be soothing to his nerves and invigorating to his body. Out-of-door employment, that which begets regular habits and stimulates his self-respect, can best give him relief. Close confinement, irritating monotony, the slavish drive of the contract sweat shop keep him a slave and cause the chains of his appetite to bind him still more tightly.

Here is a sexual pervert. His work too must be adapted to his

character. There is scarcely a known offense that men do not commit because of sex abnormality or excess. The theft, the murder or whatever it may be of which many a man is guilty is often because of his physical weakness. To place him at work that does not interest him and that causes his mind to wander off from it, because he hates it, is to encourage his thoughts to turn to that which is evil. To leave him in solitary places where he can dream is to light fires of lust in his dark soul that burn his moral being to ashes. He must be given work to do in the pure air under the bright sunlight that will bring wholesome fatigue and cause the fountains of life to be absorbed with cooling influence by his bodily tissue. It is all important that he should be given vigorous manual work; work that is a soporific so that when night comes rest should be sweet to him.

Not only the question as to the character of the body must be asked, however, but it must further be asked what is this man's mind? Is he normal or feeble-minded? The Binet or some other mental test should be given to every inmate upon entrance into a penal institution. By means of this test the mental capability of every offender is determined. About one-third of those admitted will be found to be feeble-minded. It is useless to undertake to teach this class of offenders a trade. They are by nature fit only to be drawers of water or hewers of wood. To place them at the task that requires planning and skill is to treat them inhumanly. They are capable only of simple manual toil. They can wheel a wheelbarrow filled with dirt. They can drive cows. They can chop wood or do a score of other chores, but they cannot lay bricks, build houses or print a newspaper. To ask these things of them is to demand the impossible and to waste both time and money. The wise penal administration, therefore, sets them aside for the task for which they are fitted even as the dray horse is kept for its task, while the roadster is used for another purpose.

#### *The Normal in Mind and Body*

These constitute the hopeful class of offenders. Greatest care is, therefore, needed in dealing with them. Here the individual's choice must be the basis of assignment to work. The question is: "What will this man be happiest in doing? not what does the institution need him to do, but what does he like?" It must be found

out what are his inclinations, and his natural bent must be followed as the line of least resistance, in order that, made happy by progress and encouraged by success, pride will be awakened in his soul, which will hold him like a mighty magnet in the realm of right.

The penal institution no longer is regarded as a place to punish men, but a place to reform them. At last the world has heard the Great Judge say, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," and leaving that to Him, we turn to helping our weak brother to become strong.

Two things are necessary to succeed in this: First. The institution must have absolute control of the man. He must be put in charge of those who have the single purpose in their minds of making him into a man. This one aim must never be lost sight of. Contractors who run contract shops for the purpose of making money may be good men personally, but because of their business they are really emissaries of the evil one; their sole object is one that is selfish. Their purpose is to make money. They are blinded to everything else and their presence in any penal institution is not a source of economy to the state nor a means of making men, since under such a system the offender becomes a recidivist, and through his repeated return entails a renewed expense to the state. The contract labor system is always a criminal-making as well as a commercial factory. We found this system in the New Jersey Reformatory four years ago. It had made the inmates desperate. The sullen, furtive, dogged expression was on their faces, their conduct was desperate and their souls were hopeless. Since its discontinuance an entire change has come in their character. The rebellious spirit has entirely disappeared. The serious offense against discipline has become a thing of the past. An atmosphere of hope and cheer has come and an era of good feeling has dawned. The transition from the contract to the present industrial system has been without friction. The contractors, by reasoning and persuasion, were induced voluntarily to lay down their rights that the management might be left free to work out its own plans, unhindered by interference from those who were not state officers. Fortunately the reformatory, being not very old, had much work of construction to do, and those who ran sewing machines have been kept busy erecting buildings, installing water plants, constructing a wall and doing many other things which taught a trade and which are preparing them for the state-use system in which work of an ennobling character will be assigned to them.

Second. Conscientiousness and care in assignment to work. This is a task that is so important that no one man in a penal institution can competently perform it alone. The physician, the psychologist, the chaplain, the disciplinarian and the superintendent are all required in order that the man may be studied from the several points of view that are most natural to these men. No more important time comes in the prisoner's life than that moment in which he stands before those who are to determine the place where he will work. As we have indicated, his physical and mental character, together with his past history, his present preference and his future possibilities must all be considered. It must be remembered that he has fallen by the way, that he has been a failure, that he is weak and that if he is to become strong every condition must be favorable, and that which is most likely to have the best effect upon his life must be chosen. It must be determined what he is best fitted for, and then without thought of gain to anyone but to him, he must be fitted for his work.

Two marked results have followed the use of this system: First. The number of reports for violation of rules has been reduced fifty per cent, making it possible thereby for inmates to gain their parole in four months less time on the average. Second. The young men have been fitted to secure good positions upon release.

When arrested and sent to the reformatory, the three hundred and thirteen inmates received during the fiscal year ending October 31, 1911, were earning \$5,329 per month. The positions in which the reformatory placed them when they were paroled gave these same three hundred and thirteen young men wages aggregating \$10,129 a month, nearly twice as much as they were earning when committed.

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